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Nature's Allegories

AND

Poems

BY

MAUD DUNKLEY

NEW YORK:

THE PHILOSOPHIC COMPANY

1903

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To all those who love Nature's ways and see therein teachings of truth, this little book is affectionately dedicated.

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I.

Wild Hyacinth.

WILD HYACINTH.

Was it the reflection of the sapphire sky seen through the budding branches of the trees overhead, or was it in reality a living carpet of flowers, spreading through the wood on every side, tingeing the glades and winding tree-girt glens with an all-pervading blush of the deepest royal blue?

A fairy land, a transformation scene, burst into life by the magic touch of spring!

The soft young wind rustled through the early foliage, and, sweeping over the billowy floral sea, set the hyacinth bells a-ringing in a thousand joyous chimes, and murmured gently to the dark bough looking so elegantly slender against the skyey background, till, bursting with exu-

berant delight, they sprouted profusely at the sigh of his tender breath.

A chorus of birds filled the air as they flew hither and thither in search of materials for the building of their little homes, each singing happily to his chosen mate, of the great joys yet to come.

A time of youth and spring, a time of love and the mating of Nature's loveliest and best.

"Who are those strange creatures?" inquired a little bird of her mate, as a youth and maiden entered the glade and passed side by side through the winding labyrinth of bloom.

"Mortals," replied her companion, hopping to a higher bough that he might better view the strange pair; for seldom was the solitude and privacy of the woods disturbed.

"Mortals," he continued; "they seem

very happy, and look with appreciating eyes upon our woodland glen; perhaps they also are planning out their future days."

"Yes," replied she, "they certainly do look very happy."

"Ah," her companion continued, flying down again, "I wonder if they can hear the hyacinth bells; they say these mortals are very deaf and very blind."

"O, surely they can hear the chimes the fairy fays are ringing. Hark! how joyously they peal, and yet they have no nests to build, no eggs to lay, and no little ones to rear."

"We know not of their happiness, but that they are happy is very certain. What constitutes their joy, I cannot say, —unless it is the flooding of the sunshine, the soft kisses of the wind, or the gentle falling of the twilight dew."

"Perhaps 'tis all," replied his little wife: and as the deep blue billows bowed before the fanning breeze, peal after peal of their rich bell-notes rang out.

"How softly the wind is blowing; how gently and tenderly it stirs the cluster of my bells; they sway before him, but they tremble to his touch—I have to shake them into sound!"

So sang a tiny fay sitting on one of the blue petals of her hyacinth blossoms.

"Yes," answered another, swaying from his bending stem, "the wind is soft, the sunshine warm; my bells, well washed in dew, are rich and sweet; the world is very beautiful, and I am very happy."

"They say the world is not so beautiful outside our fairy dell."

"So I have heard; a bullfinch told me. He says the world is great with cities in whose dusty, flowerless streets are stones

and dirt and barrenness. The dwellings of men, he says, are dark, heavy and gloomy; sickness and death full oft invade them; brightness and sunshine in their overcrowded alleys are a luxury and a rarity."

"How can he tell these things?"

"He was once among them, confined within the glittering bars of a prison-house hung in the window of one of these dwellings."

"And he escaped?"

"Yes, he escaped, and after awhile, refound his woodland home."

"Poor mortals! how delightful a breath and sight of us must be to them in their dusty, cheerless homes."

"Well, yes, they value us, I have heard it said; we brighten their darkness and help to pierce their blind despair."

At this moment there came in sight

the two mortals who had astonished the simple little hen-bird; and one of them, chancing to notice in particular the very hyacinth who had so kindly spoken, stooped, and quite unconscious of the tender-hearted little fay, with a smile of admiration, plucked the flower, placed it with many others in the bunch she held in her hand, and passed on, leaving the little fay's comrade trembling with fright and grief. He had lost his play-fellow—she had passed out of his life; her faint cry of pain as her stalk had snapped asunder smote his ear long after her farewell sigh had died away upon the breeze.

Recovering from her fright, the little stolen blossom began to look about her. She was being carried past fields and trees out into the brilliant sunshine. The two mortals were laughing and talking together, and occasionally paused to gather

a stray flower or leaf to swell their already overcharged bouquet.

The sun was bright, the way was long and dusty, and the hand that held the flowers was hot and close. The poor little fay felt suffocated, the stiff stalk of her bell-cluster grew limp, the petals of her blossoms drooped, and she hung her head and wept.

Presently the clasp around her stem relaxed, and she felt herself gradually slipping away out of its pressure. At last she dropped, unnoticed, on the sidewalk of the street, for by this time they had entered the town and left the country far behind them. The pair passed on and were soon out of sight, while the poor little fay lay with her drooping bells upon the hot, dry sidewalk, with the scorching rays of the sun beating down mercilessly upon her unsheltered and unprotected head.

She grew fainter and fainter; limper and limper grew her stem and lower and lower sank her fading blossoms, when, ah! steps approached, someone stooped and picked up the fallen hyacinth, and, screening it from the fierce glare beneath his tattered coat, carried it swiftly and joyfully away.

When once again she opened her eyes, she found herself lying on a rough wooden bench, while a little ragged urchin was filling a broken jar with water. This done, he placed the limp stalk of the hyacinth in the cool, clear liquid, and propped the drooping bells against the window ledge.

The cool draught of water gradually revived the flower, and the little fay, looking about her, perceived, crouching against the window sill, a poor, thin little figure with a pale, pinched face. She was

regarding the hyacinth with unfeigned delight, and thanking her ragged companion, who stood silently looking on.

"It's a real beauty, Jimmy. Where did you get it?" she queried.

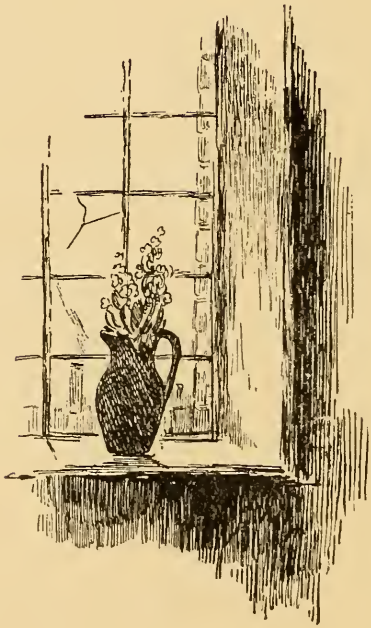
"Down the street—someone must have dropped it," was the reply.

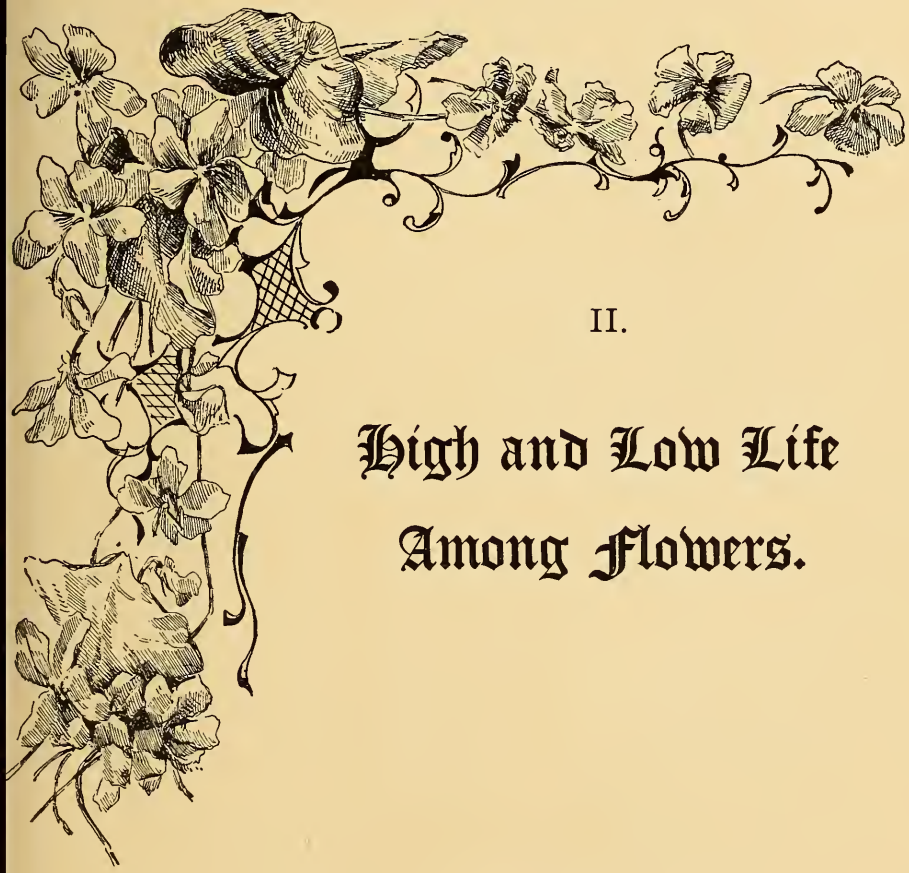
"How fine it is! look at those pretty bells. It is reviving—my! what a lovely color."

The little fay thrilled with delight as she saw the happiness depicted on the pallid face of the child before her. And it was *her* presence that had brought it there! The pain of her own affliction and loss vanished, chased into nothingness by the absorbing joy created by an unselfish and loving thought. She trembled with pleasure, and drinking long and deep of the cool, refreshing liquid, her stalk grew firm once more, her bells regained

their former lustre and sent forth peal upon peal of fairy music.

So the hours passed by; night came on, and closing her petals, the little fay slept the sleep of the kindly-hearted, awaking with the sun next morning to bloom through another day, watched by the eager eyes of the little child.





II.

High and Low Life Among Flowers.

HIGH AND LOW LIFE AMONG FLOWERS.

The dreamy strains of the waltz float through the crowded ball-room, and the air is fraught with the essence of languid exhilaration.

Of all the beautiful daughters of humanity gathered in that brilliant throng, there is one who by her imperial beauty outshines them all. She is the belle, and against the dazzling snowdrift of her bosom rests a spray of flowers.

The night advances. The heat and glare of the room begin to tell upon the floral decorations.

"This is insufferable, I am stifling," sighed a violet in the bouquet of the belle.

"The air is foul, though the heat is

agreeable," responded a gardenia next her.

"The heat agreeable! It is parching," moaned the violet. "I am becoming weak and limp; it is draining my vitality."

"The impure atmosphere and glare are tarnishing my beauty; I feel my petals begin to shrivel," bewailed the gardenia.

"O, for the cool, green glade of my birth," murmured the violet.

"O, for the unsullied warmth of my hothouse home," groaned the gardenia, "that I might once more nestle my pearly petals among my parent's glossy leaves."

"You surely cannot pine for warmth! Pine rather for the cool, invigorating breath of the fresh, young wind; or for the clear, life-renewing dew which settles in delicious drops upon one's parched and weary frame. The hothouse? Bah!

Why pine for that? You have a hothouse here."

"A hothouse here! Poor flowerlet, you cannot know of what you speak. Have you ever breathed the air of a hothouse?"

"Never, nor do I ever wish to," responded the violet. "I have heard many a time of your greenhouses, with their hot, suffocating atmosphere and pale, languid beauties. The shady vale and cool, brisk breeze for me. I wish not for the listless life of you sickly aristocrats."

"Sickly aristocrats, indeed! You speak in ignorance, poor, lowly blossom that you are. But how should you speak otherwise? What know you of the luscious intensity of the lives led by our higher grade of flowers? What do you know of the delicate perfection of our tint, the transparency of our forms, and the refinement and delicacy of our

scent? We are, indeed, the aristocracy of the floral world."

"I know that with all your delicacy and refinement, your pale beauty cannot compare with the rich tints of many of our members, the perfection of their forms, or the sweetness of their perfume. Nor can you, with all your cultured breeding and luxuriance, outshine the general loveliness of our class."

"Nonsense! Pure nonsense! Yours is but a coarse plebian beauty, very good in its way, I daresay, but not to be compared with the delicacy and refinement of ours."

"Not so. Ours is not a coarse beauty; it is vivified with a rich coloring which your pallid loveliness lacks."

"We are not pallid, we are a fair and palely-tinted race, our color etherealized and spiritualized to a glow of wondrous

beauty. Our very scent is delicate, and steeps the soul of mortals in infinite delight."

"Your fragrance is overbearing, and mortals find it so; different to ours, which gladdens the heart of man and sweetens every passing breeze."

"Nonsense again! Your perfume oft grates upon the sense, and in some of your members it is indeed obnoxious."

At this moment a cold draught of air blew upon the limp, emaciated flowers, and immediately afterwards they were crushed beneath the heavy folds of a wrap. When again they were uncovered, it was to be plucked ruthlessly from the bosom they had in their beauty adorned and carelessly cast aside to ebb out their fleeting lives in the cold grey dawn of morning upon the bejeweled dressing table of the ball's fair belle.

A garden, beautiful as a dream. Its balmy air fragrant with the breath of every species of flower that grows.

* * * * * *

A hazy radiance spreads over the confines of this enchanted region in which each season has its own domain and reigns with perpetual, uninterrupted sway. It is the pleasure ground of Flora, into which the disembodied spirits of the two contending flowers are being wafted.

As they reach the borders of this radiant land, they are enveloped in a thick, white mist, then caught suddenly in the arms of the wind and ushered unceremoniously into the domain of Spring.

Hardly have they entered before their attention is arrested by a faint chime of bells, and they come upon a group of little snowdrops, their white blossoms gracefully suspended from their fragile stems above

the hard, brown surface of the earth.

But on they are borne, past banks of sad-eyed primroses and gaily-colored crocuses, on into the seclusion of a green and mossy dell.

"My home," murmured the shade of the violet. "Ah! me! the breath of my sisters is upon the gale, their deep, royal purple is decking the grassy banks. How sweet and how secluded is this spot—ah, me, that I might lay my restless spirit down upon the bosom of my parent sod!"

But on, on, they are borne, on into the summer sunshine. Here many and varied are the flowers that meet their view, and every turn brings fresh species and wonders to their astonished sight. The tall, graceful lily here blossoms in its sweetness and purity, breathing to the wind its gentle whispers of chastity and truth; the queenly rose blooms in its rich

voluptuousness, diffusing upon the air around the flood of its identity—warm, profuse, intense; the blue-eyed forget-me-not, the innocent daisy, the hardy wall-flower and delicious mignonette bloom in careless profusion and fill with wonder and contrition the conscious spirit of the gardenia.

"That so much sweetness and beauty should exist without one's knowledge! How ignorant and foolish I have been in my boastful arrogance. Here are hundreds and thousands of flowers and plants of whose species and very existence I was totally ignorant. Among the middle or lower grade of flower-life I find distributed a loveliness and a fragrance unsurpassed. But, ah! whither are we wafted? I breathe my native air—these wax-like blossoms are familiar, these dark, green glossy leaves—it is—it is my home!"

"How exquisitely beautiful! What world is this?" exclaimed the violet beside her, pausing before a richly blooming orange bough. "And, O, whence this delicious perfume? What tints, what glorious tints are these, ethereally transparent in their flesh-like hue?"

She gazed about her in bewilderment. On every side new loveliness met her view; the wax-like camelia, the rich-scented petals of the stephanotis, the delicate, fantastic orchids; the pure, rich tints of the begonia; the stately calla lily, the azalea, the sensitive mimosa, and many other floral gems too numerous to mention.

A sweet flowering myrtle next attracted her.

"Ah, beauteous flower, thou, even as our rose, the type of love. Ah, shame to me, that with untutored mind I scorned

in ignorance the surpassing beauty and merits of you unknown tropic flowers. Our common parent is most wise. In ignorant, boastful pride we ridiculed each other and our different orders, till by a kindly hand we were guided hither to be cured of our willfulness and pointed to our error."

"You are right," replied the contrite gardenia, "ours it is to bloom in our allotted sphere, one not better than another, all living our flower-day life, simply, cheerfully and contentedly."

She ceased, and darkness wrapped the spot.

The following day the dead flowers were picked up from the dressing table where they had lain and were thrown from the window into the garden below.

III.

The Wild Winds Blow.

THE WILD WINDS BLOW.

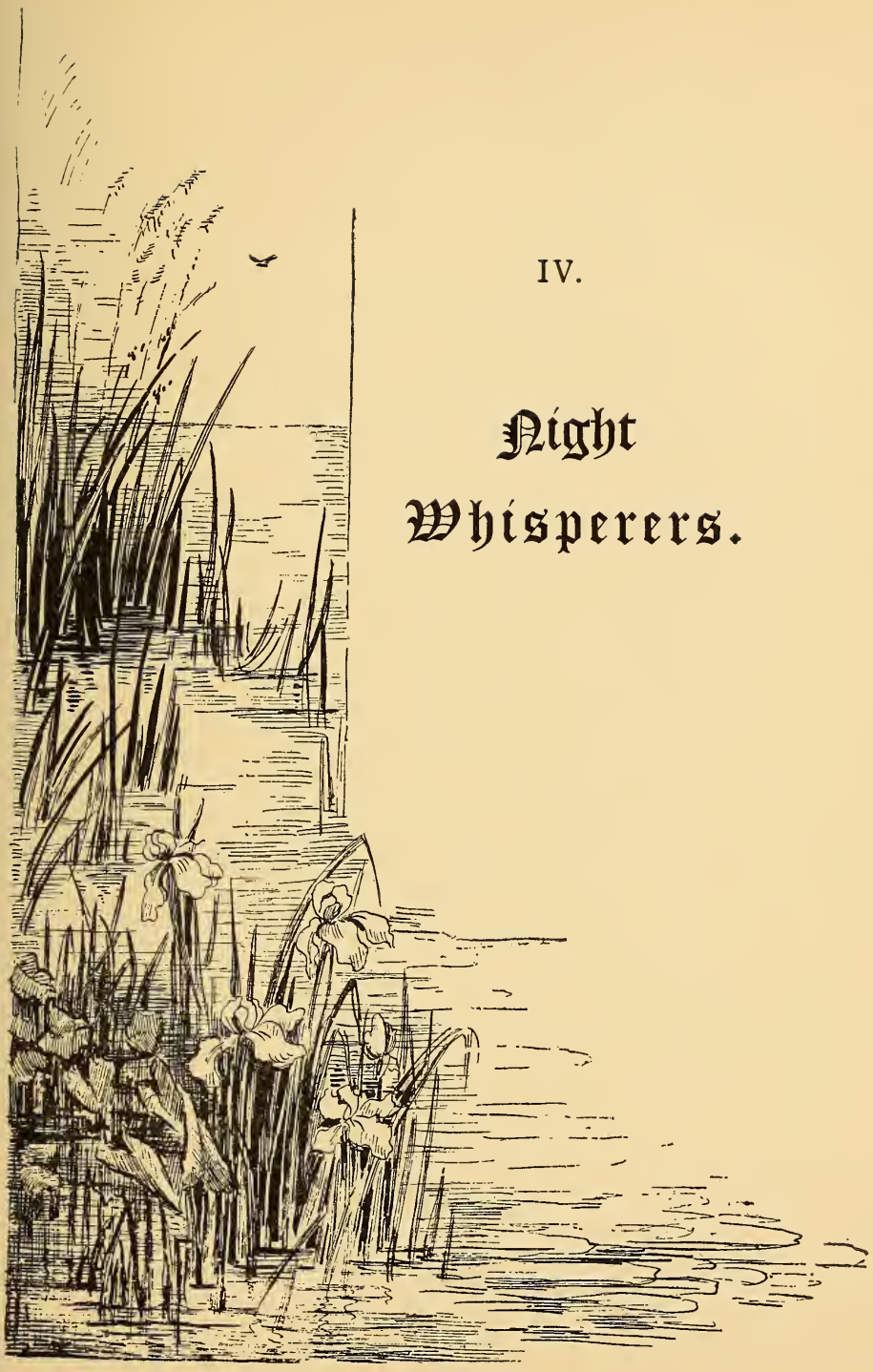
The wild winds blow
O'er the bleak moor side,
Through the naked forest
The stream doth glide.

The trunks of the trees
Are bare and brown,
And the twigs by the wind
Are shaken down.

O'er the soft moist earth
Where the dead leaves lie,
The sharp March breeze
Is sweeping by.

O'er the marshy moor
Where the reeds grow wild
And the rushes bow
To Spring's first child.

A desolate day
Like the desolate heart,
'Ere the warm sun of love
Doth life impart



IV.

Night Whisperers.

NIGHT WHISPERERS.

The tarn lay still. Its cradle, gloomy, melancholy, and dull, sunk deeply at the base of the mountains, weird and awful in the majesty of might and solitude. Sluggish and dreamless was the water's sleep beneath the chill bleak twilight sky; gray shadows, phantom-like, stole over the ground; the lingering light of day gleamed fainter with expiring life; the wind moaned piteously and sighed, as with reluctant will he swept with fitful gusts the bleak moorside and mount-locked tarn, and rustled with his mournful breath the rushes 'round the wild duck's nest. Closer pressed the loving bosom of the mother bird upon her sleeping brood of young, and, calling in wonder to her mate who lay as boat at anchor on the

sleepy surface of the tarn, she said.

"Why moans the wind? What seeks he in his night's bleak wanderings? Why sighs he so? His voice is lonesome, sad."

"I know not; ask him, when again he comes, what sorrow is it that he carries on his wings."

"I will, when he descends the mountain heights and sweeps with his breath the surface of the mere; he is too heartlone to do us mischief or to give us pain."

Once more the mountain hollows echoed with a sigh, once more the surface of the tarn was crumpled into rippling waves, and once more did the rushes bow before the sad night breeze.

"Stay, stay!" the wild duck cried. "Why moanest thou thus, O wind? What sorrow dost thou bear upon thy wide-spread wings? Say, for I feel for thee

thy trouble must be great, or thou couldst not steep the silent night so deep with tearless sighs. What mighty woe is thine?"

"What woe is mine?" the wind with plaintive wail replied. "What woe is mine? Ah me! a woe so great that steeps my being in agony supreme. A woe that must find vent, and pour itself in Nature's deepest, choicest solitudes, there to receive the balm of blest relief, there to unburden and discharge some of its overladen and suppressed despair. What woe is mine? The great woe of the Universe, the sorrows of a struggling world! The lonely moor, the mountain solitude, and e'en the vast immensity of ocean's might, all, all have heard my cry. They take my woe and answer back again, till we are spent, exhausted, calmed—calmed by the soothing magic of a voiceless sym-

pathy, a force supremely vast and wonderful that bids us wail and wail and find relief. Such is my sorrow, O tender-hearted bird, and such the reason why I moan."

"Ah! great indeed is thy sorrow. The voice of earth art thou, and bearest in thy sigh the utterance of a universe. But wind, O wind of night, one question more is there that I would ask: Earth has its sorrow, true; but has it then no joy? So beautiful it is, so manifold and wonderful! Joy surely there must be; nor grief alone hid in its deepmost hollows and ravines. The brightness of the morning sun, the golden warmth and glory of the day, the joy of being and the love of life, and light of love that beats within our wild-fowl breast—are these as naught? And is it in our world, our narrow world alone, that joy and gladness only then are found?"

"Joy? joy? There is no joy. The

hollow shadow called joy endureth not. Joy! joy! what is it? Happiness, delight, but passing fancies of an hour, shadows that melt and fade away in ungrasped and unapproached nothingness and gloom. No; wail on, poor Earth! swept with the throes of deep affliction and despair."

"No joy! no joy!——"

"Nay, the night-wind erreth," spake a star, his faint voice trembling from above; "his wailing makes him sore. I am above the wind, and from another sphere behold the earth and all things on her bosom. Unprejudiced I behold and judge most differently, O wind! The sorrows of the earth are in thy voice, 'tis true; and also anger when the Universe doth rise and shake with tempests in her rage; but love is there, and joy, and pure delight. For when with gentle touch ye fan the flowery mead, or flap with joy the white sail at

the mast, or rustle with a sweet delight the leafy foliage of the sun-kissed trees, then, then the joy and love and life break forth from the awakened sod, and cry with many voices to the wind of heaven! Created life re-lives, humanity shakes off the trammels of a dust-worn life and breathes, and cries rejoicing, 'This is Spring!' Nay, joy then *is* on earth, in every form, in every land; and every tongue doth give it forth, proclaims it unto heaven. Sorrow and joy go hand in hand, go side by side, for what is sorrow but the shadow-form of Joy; one, in the great pervading, all-absorbing soul of Harmony? Seek it, O wind! and fear to pass it by. 'Tis there around thee; bear it on thy wings. Then even thy midnight voices will have a triumphant sweetness in their melancholy all their own. Bear it then with thee on thy wings, and whis-

per o'er the lives and through the souls of earth's great progeny the magic word of Joy! Bid them cherish it, seek to make it theirs—not the mere semblance of a joy, but Joy, pure, undefiled and innocent; the joy within the reach of all, the joy created, nourished, bedded in each tiny living germ. Capacity for love, the power of true delight, teach thou then this, and not the nurture of a self-afflicted grief to darken with a cloud each life. Teach this instead, and whisper of a soul-created Love, a soul-created Joy!'

The pale star ceased; the wind, corrected, sank to rest and moaned no more; the wild duck's heart grew glad, as the gray dawn broke, and warm rays of yellow light streamed forth above the mountain tops and gilded with golden glory the still surface of the silent mere. Day broke, earth threw aside her sombre

shroud; the heron greeted the golden morn; the wild duck's brood awoke, and led by their tender mother, soon dotted the awakening bosom of the mountain tarn lying bathed in the brilliant blushes of the day.

V.

The Frost Elves.

THE FROST ELVES.

'Tis a clear, cold, frosty night.

The town, with its big houses and high church steeples, glistens in the moonbeams, and floods of yellow light stream from countless windows behind whose sheltering screen crowds of happy children are enjoying the last evening of the old year.

And beyond the town lies the country—a vast expanse of sparkling wilderness, the trees and bushes standing out in white symmetry against the sapphire sky. Silence reigns around, unbroken save by the occasional falling of a twig which some passing breeze shakes from its resting place. And yet the air is alive with motion: myriads of little figures, white and sparkling as the frost itself, and but a fraction of an inch in height, are hurry-

ing with all the speed their tiny silvered wings permit towards the great forest shadowed in the distance.

Joining a group of them we find ourselves flying swiftly through the air, and at last we enter the wood. It is darker here, for the overarching branches, leafless though they be, are so intertwined and so fantastically clothed in their glittering frost-garb, that the pale moonbeams cannot force their way through the crystal roof.

On we go, deeper and deeper into the forest, and after proceeding a long distance we reach the entrance of a beautiful glade. Here one seems to be in an enchanted land; frost sprites are hurrying in all directions, and pressing eagerly forward towards the head of the glen, which presently bursts upon our view.

What a scene is this! A wide open

space surrounded by the frost-clad forest trees. In the background a group of spruce firs spread their feathery arms on high, whilst in the centre of the glen a beautiful silver birch rears itself from a mound of earth slightly higher than the neighboring ground. A holly bush, too, stands near by, rich in its bright red berries and dark green leaves frost-frilled along their peaked and indented edges.

Under the birch tree are seated rows and rows of the old frost elves—Frost Elders as they are called—little figures with white streaming hair and beards, and long loose robes scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding whiteness of the snow-clad earth. Seated on a knoll at the root of the tree is a venerable elf, noticeable among the others by the shining frost crown which encircles his temples, and the star tipped wand he carries in his hand.

A space is cleared before him, beyond which the frost elves in countless numbers have assembled, and are still assembling. They cover the branches of the surrounding trees, resting comfortably on the peaks of the holly leaves and even on the red berries themselves; and all are fluttering their wings impatiently for the time to arrive when the old frost king will elect his successor, from a band of chosen elves who have been selected for the purpose on account of their useful deeds and good behavior during the preceding year.

The time draws nigh, the elves are nearly all gathered, and only arrive in straggling twos and threes. At last the old king rises, and advancing to the edge of the knoll, addresses the multitude before him:

"My children! during the past year I have been privileged to rule as your king,

and have monthly held my court and councils in my palace hall in the North. I have sent you forth as bands of commissioners with work to do in all parts of the earth, wherever you could penetrate, and withstand the deadly influence of our enemies, the sunbeams. Ah! their power is indeed strong, and many are the frost elves who have fallen victims to their fatal smile, or who have been chased back over the border line of the frigid zone by their ruthless pursuers, the thaw spirits. Many, too, are the victories won by my faithful subjects over that degenerate brood; full oft have you withstood their mischievous inroads; many a time have you turned and locked fast your tormentors in a chill embrace, till the slothful sunbeams came to their rescue. Often during the past year have you made noble sallies into the southern regions, powdered their fields and

forests with the beautiful garb we so delight in, and locking their rivers in an ice-bound sleep have so rested their weary waters.

"But at the same time you have erred, my children. You have also been mischievous; crept into the houses of mortals, breathed upon their window panes, cracked their glasses, frozen their milk, and otherwise played havoc in their larders! Then you have pinched their noses and ears, bitten their fingers and toes, and, glazing their streets, have caused many a broken limb.

"Still worse, you have been cruel, my frost elves! You have frozen many a homeless bird, and hardened the earth so long as to starve many a winged songster; then you have nipped the young and tender leaf buds. Ah! you have often been careless, mischievous and cruel!

And you know, my frost elves, for every fault you will have to suffer; and each time you abuse your power, the sunbeams and thaw spirits are ordained your chastisers."

He paused, and looking around, continued:

"During the past year you have been good, faithful subjects to me, and now that my reign draws to a close, I am here to appoint one of the chosen band to succeed me as your ruler; then will I take my place henceforth among the Elders."

He resumed his seat, and all the elves with one accord arose and burst into the following song:

Fare thee well, dear Father Frost!
Naught from thy teaching have we lost;
In the future thou shalt see
How kindly we will strive to be.

Fare thee well, our Ruler kind!
A better we can never find;
Among the elders take thy place,
But show us first the new king's face.

Fare thee well! there ne'er was seen
A better reign than thine has been;
Honor, glory, praise is due,
Ruler Frost, from us to you.

Scarcely had this song died away when a sound resembling the tinkling of tiny glass bells was heard, and a procession of imps, dressed after the fashion of pages, appeared, advancing towards the spot where the old king was sitting. Each elf carried a tiny ice bell suspended from a long wand, and the motion of their steps as they walked caused the bells to send forth peals of delicious music. Behind these pages came the chosen band of elves

marching two by two, their feet keeping time to the music as they marched.

They passed in a winding procession before the rows of elders, and finally stood in a semi-circle around the old king. The imps, with their bells, took up their position on either side of the tree, and stood motionless and silent as he arose and began to examine the elves waiting around him.

They were twenty-four in number, and all exceedingly beautiful; their little garments, surpassingly white and clean, fitted without a wrinkle to the slender limbs and graceful figures of their owners. Their tiny transparent wings glistened like gossamer in the moonlight, and were nervously fluttering with expectation; their little faces were aglow with excitement, and their pale grey eyes anxiously watched their king as he keenly scrutinized

every elf in succession, scanning each from head to foot to see whether there was the slightest spot or stain on either himself or his garments, which would at once inform him that the elf had sinned. For the least wilful error or fault committed by a frost elf leaves a stain upon him that nothing will remove. There were few spots to be seen, still the sharp eyes of the old king noted them, and caused him to inquire into their origin. On two elves alone he could find no stain; so, drawing them into the centre of the ring, he addressed them as follows:

"Of all the twenty-four elves chosen for me to select a successor from, you are the only two upon whom I can find no stain; it remains to me, therefore, to appoint one of you king—which one I am at present at a loss to say, for both of you being spotless, are, to all appearances, equally en-

titled to the kingdom. There must, however, be some difference between you, and it is now my duty to find out what that difference is; therefore, I wish you each to relate to me the history of your adventures during the past year. Elf on the right, begin." The king resumed his seat, while the elf began as follows:

FIRST ELF'S STORY.

"I was sent forth with some thousands of my brothers to go and repair the mischief perpetrated by our tormentors, the thaw spirits. They had been unusually busy, so, separating into bands we scattered in all directions, some flying to the east, some to the south, and some to the west.

"I joined myself to a small party flying eastward and kept along the boundary of the northern sea. On our way we encountered many icebergs that had broken

loose from their hold and been set afloat by the thaw spirits so that they drifted toward the southern climes and disappeared before the influence of the sunbeams. Upon these icebergs we breathed, and turned them aside from their course by hardening the waves around, thus making them standing monuments of our power. Whole fields of ice soon marked our track, and before long we touched the northern shores of that great continent whose rivers own our sway, and usually remain for months vast sheets of ice. Here, too, the thaw spirits had been at work, and slowly now the waters ran, while the far-spreading plains were saturated with moisture. These we refroze by a breath, and again fast bound their rivers. Passing southward, we powdered the huge mountain ranges, and held their torrents as they would have bounded down

the dark ravines. Moving westward, we crossed the mighty steppes, stiffening the ground and clothing the vegetation in our glorious raiment, till naught could be distinguished in the wilderness of white. Then we proceeded northward, sweeping by great cities and ice-bound coasts, turning our attention again toward the polar regions, leaving a glorious tract behind us and raising glittering monuments in our honor, to astonish the marvelling eyes of northern explorers by their magnificence and splendor.

"On all sides we defeated our enemies. Even the sunbeam's smile waxed pale and wan before us as we proceeded in our triumphal career.

"And from these northern regions I hurried to be present at this gathering of the frost elves, arriving but just in time to be selected by the elders as one of the

privileged band honored by your Majesty's most gracious inspection and choice."

He ceased, and bowing low before the king withdrew a step or so, whilst the second elf, who had remained silent and motionless during the recital, now, at a sign from the king, stepped forward and began:

SECOND ELF'S STORY.

"I was sent forth at the same time as my brother, but joining a band journeying southward, soon found myself flying over the land of the Lapp, and heard the tinkling of the sleigh bells ringing out on the frosty air as the reindeer, with the speed of the wind, drew his master over the slippery ground.

"Next, a range of snow-capped mountains met my view. Descending, we saw a party of men toiling up their dangerous sides; dangerous, indeed, for the thaw

spirits had been busy among the mountains, and many a huge boulder of ice had been loosened from its stronghold, and was ready, at the faintest sound, to thunder down the heights into the peaceful valleys below, swallowing up the party in its descent, and destroying many a picturesque chalet and honest household in its terrific plunge. To prevent these evils, we regirt the mountains with the fastness of our strength; and having thus secured the safety of the mountaineer, passed eastward, and visited mortals in their great dark cities.

"Into one of these cities I flew one night, and passing over the broad squares and gardens of the rich, entered into the narrow alleys of the poor. Herds of mankind, in the most degraded condition, were continually passing to and fro, discordant sounds filled the air, the streets and houses

were polluted and foul, filth and disease stalked abroad and saturated the atmosphere with their obnoxious odors.

"I hardened the soft, miry roads, dried up the noxious moisture, and rendering the murky air keen and frosty, killed the germs of disease that floated on every side. I whitened with snowy feathers the houses, sidewalks, and gutters; then, creeping through a broken windowpane, found myself in a dark attic, bare and empty, save for a broken chair and a filthy straw mattress whereon lay the shrunken form of a little boy. He was in the height of fever, his lips were parched and dry as he lay tossing and moaning in delirium. A broken cup lay on the floor beside him. I looked into it—it was empty. I stooped over him; he was alone and friendless, no one to care for him, no one to soothe his pain. Better to be out of the world than

to live on in it, so I kissed his hot forehead and burning lips, breathed on his face and chest, and touched the heart that beat so wildly. Then all was still—he fell into that slumber from which there is no awakening.

"My work there was done, so on I journeyed. Entering next a park, I froze its ponds so that the children of mortals might enjoy the delights of the season, and passing on by stately mansions, I espied the form of a woman crouching on the broad steps that led up to the entrance of one of these grand dwellings. Light and laughter poured forth from the many windows, but outside all was dark and drear. I drew near to the woman, and saw that she was dead—some one had been before me; but the babe upon her breast yet lived, its puny face turned upward to the frosty night. I kissed its

lips and drew its breath away—its soul was free to join its mother's.

"I arose and behold a frost maiden stood before me.

"'You have finished my work,' she said, 'poor things! they are better off now, happier perhaps than those beyond yon lighted windows.' Thus speaking, we flew on together through the night, out of the city, and on toward this forest to which all your Majesty's faithful subjects were summoned to appear."

So ended the second elf's story.

Then the old king arose and thus addressed his subjects:—

"You have all heard these two elves record the history of their adventures; both have done good, useful work, and are entitled to our highest praise; but I commend to you the second elf, whose kindly spirit and thoughtfulness for others have

guided all his actions, and directed him to seek his work in filthy alleys and fever-smitten atmosphere. The safety and good of others, the happiness and comfort of the poor and neglected have been his ruling motives. His brother's chief aim, on the contrary, was ambition for the aggrandizement and glory of his race. To the second elf, therefore, I, with perfect confidence and assurance, resign my crown and diadem.'

So saying, he took from his head the frost crown and placed it upon the white curling locks of the elf before him, and giving the star-crowned wand into his right hand led him to the tree knoll, bowed low before him and proclaimed him king.

Then, with one accord, all the elves shouted with joy; whilst the young king arose and, bowing his acknowledgments, said he hoped he would prove as good a

king as he who had just resigned, and taking the hand of the little frost maiden he had met on his journey, he led her before his subjects and claimed her as his queen.

The band of imps then marched forward, their ice bells pealing forth while all the frost elves and maidens rose, and dancing around the tree sang:

The world is glistening
On every side
With a thousand diamonds,
This New Year tide.

The moon is shining
Over all;
'Mong feathery trees
Her pale beams fall.

And we frost elves
With gossamer wing,
In a joyous circle
Dance round our king.

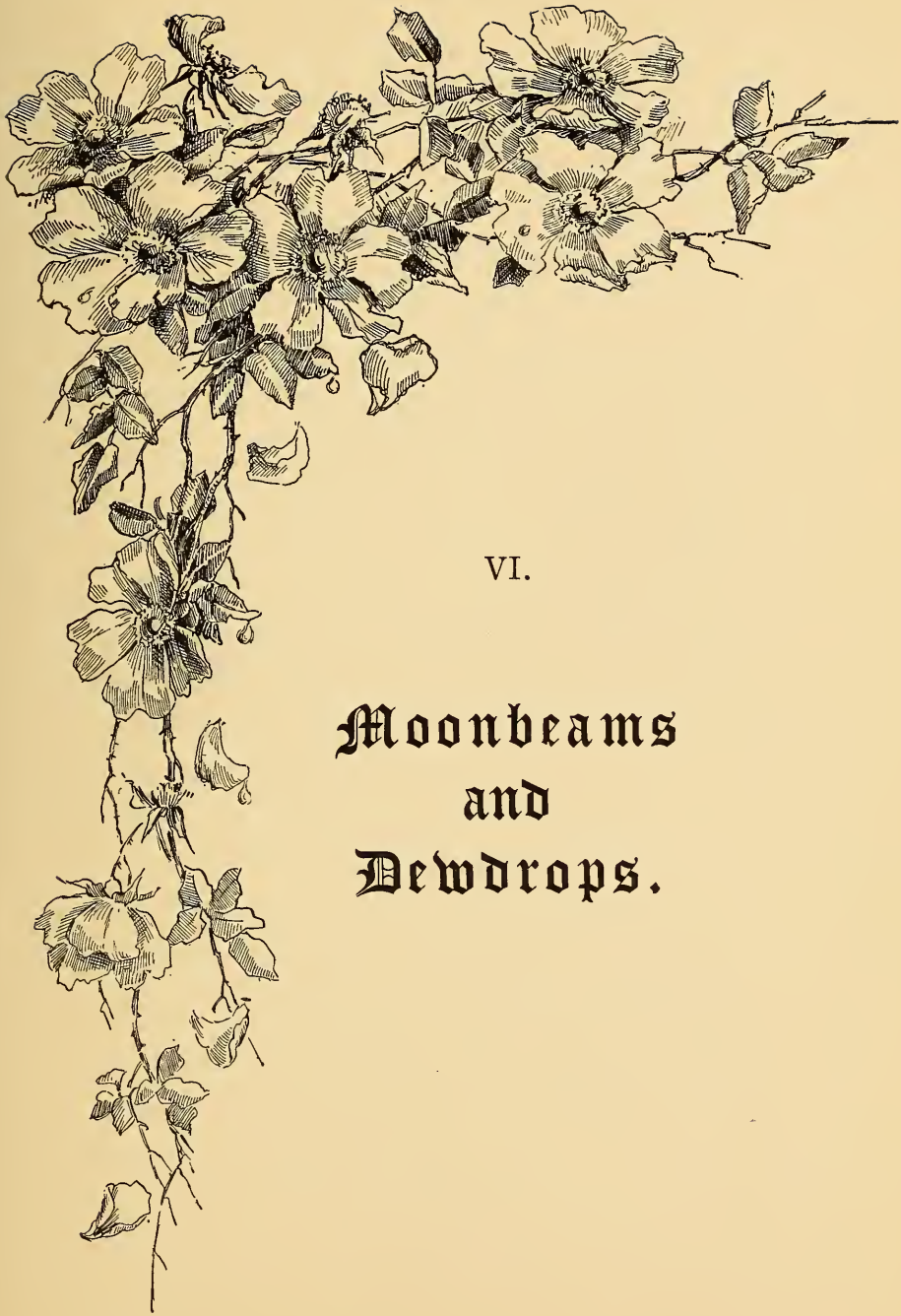
For our king is good,
And our queen is fair,
With her flowing robes
And her silver hair.

So we'll dance away
In the pale dim light,
While the ice bells ring
And the moon is bright.

And then we'll creep
Away to our beds,
And under the leaves
Hide our weary heads.

Our king is elected,
Our time is o'er,
And we must away—
We may dance no more.

The moon waxed pale, but before the last rays had faded the glade was empty and deserted, for the little frost elves had all flown away to their beds.



VI.

Moonbeams and Dewdrops.

THE MOONBEAMS AND THE DEWDROPS.

Lightly play the moonbeams over the quiet surface of the lake, silvering its bosom and flitting with pale brilliancy into the deepest shadows. Intensely white and beautiful they stream forth in virgin chastity from their lunar source and speed through the unbroken indigo of the chill, dark night. Earth sleeps peacefully, nor does the faint radiance of the moonlight disturb her repose.

On the margin of the lake, fringing the water's edge, are grasses and reeds of wild and luxuriant growth. "Ah," sighed a large dewdrop, plaintively, as it glistened on the narrow surface of an overladen grass blade, "how much I would give to drop into the silver bosom of the lake beneath me!"

"And why?" inquired the soft voice of a moonbeam, gliding with her companion at this moment over the murmurer's bending support.

"Why! Because it is so smooth and beautiful—so wide, so vast, so wondrously fair. Oh, to feel myself falling into the molten liquid silverness, to be swallowed up, to become part of it, and to spread myself out also beneath the lustre of the pale, cold moon?"

"Do we not shed our lustre on you as you are? Do you not sparkle and glisten like glassy crystals as you hang suspended from every blade and spray and leaflet? Why so ill-content? A happy and a beauteous lot is yours. Why grumble that the task set you is to nourish your green support and to strengthen it against the heat and dryness of the coming day. Be contented with your

present state until you have gained from it all it has to give, nor seek to change your lot till you have exhausted its opportunities and reaped all its advantages."

"But I am not content. Why should I not become that which I would be? Why should I not drop headlong into the silver mirror that spreads so invitingly below—'twould not be far to fall? Oh, that my weight would bend the grass still lower so that I might overbalance and fall, fall with rapture into the bosom of my desire."

"Foolish dewdrop, foolish child of earth's production; contrary as the various sources of your being. Know that you are now even as that gleaming expanse—a drop of water, water the same as that of which the lake there is composed. And why do the waters gleam

in silvery whiteness? Their glory is not their own, but the pure, pale radiance that we children of the moon shed over the sea and land. Clear and resplendent you yourself at this moment appear, even as the surface of the lake you so foolishly and ignorantly envy."

In vain did the moonbeam strive to stem the current of the dewdrop's discontent. Swelling with wilfulness and pride, it grew and trembled on its fragile resting-place. The night wind stirred from sleep, and as he moved restlessly through the trees he caught the sigh of the murmurer and heard its low complaint—"Oh, that I might fall into the lake beneath me and leave this lonely blade of grass."

"Thou art foolish," he muttered, "foolish and discontented. Go and learn through experience, wisdom."

Down, down, a drop of liquid light it fell, till with a faint splash it reached the waters beneath.

"Ah," sighed the moonbeam, "error and self-made unhappiness enter even here."

A cloud for a moment obscured the moon, and when again the moonbeams glimmered forth they fell with renewed radiance upon the silent earth.

"How softly the moonbeams shine," murmured a dewdrop, as it nestled in the bosom of a rose-leaf.

"And how fair and pure their loveliness," answered another.

"Night is gloomy and soulless without them," added a third.

"Without their silvery smiles, it is weary waiting for the rising of the sun," joined in yet another.

"Yes," returned the first, gleaming on

her rose-leaf bed, "but the leaves have need of us; they would droop and wither in the sun's great heat if it were not for our cool, refreshing moisture."

"True," another answered, "night is the great renewer and reviver of the Earth. For my part, I love the silvery moonbeams more even than I love the sunbeam's golden glory; the one draws us out and encourages us; the other chases us away from our leafy resting-places into the darkness of the earth."

"Nay, they do not so; they draw us into the floating atmosphere. Speak not harshly of the sunbeams; they are glorious and needful to the day."

"I know," returned the dewdrop. "But see, here come two gleaming rays to flood us with their beauty."

Even as she spoke, the two moonbeams passed from witnessing the fall of the

wilful dewdrop by the water's brink, and shone in all their loveliness upon the cluster of dewbeads gathered upon the wild-rose spray.

"A happy group," quoth the first newcomer, as she wound herself in and out of the delicate leaflets, causing the clustering dew to flash like the diamonds in a lady's tiara.

"A happy group," she murmured as she kissed the sparkling drops.

"How can we fail to be? See how fair the leaves we rest upon, their dainty veins and tenderly clipped edges. We joyfully rest upon their fresh young bosoms, both glad and proud to strengthen their glowing vigor and brighten the verdure of their youth."

"Such is the cause and reason of our present existence," continued another. "A dainty life to lie swathed in the folds

of a rose-leaf, bathed in the halo of the summer moon!"

"You are then contented and happy with your simple lot, and seek no further glories?" And the moonbeam caressed softly the dew-bespangled rose tree.

"Contented—how can we be otherwise? What further glories should we seek?'

"None. None is greater than that of fulfilling whatever duty is set before you. Those who seek to change the lot Nature has appointed them invariably go astray, and learn to value wisdom when it comes too late."

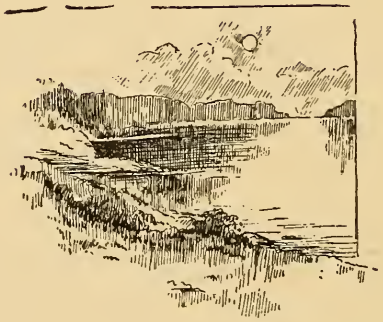
"Where gleanest thou thy knowledge, O daughter of the moon? Do the stars teach thee in thy silent flight? Or is it from this earth of ours thou drawest those draughts of wisdom so profound?"

"From each and all must one learn something; none are so small or so insig-

nificant but that they have a great truth to unfold. But see, our light grows dim, the gray dawn soon breaks in the east, the time of the sun's awaking is at hand. Soon golden heralds will proclaim the morn, and you will be bathed in the glory of reopening day. Our time is short, and we wax faint and wan; we must again to starry space. Farewell, farewell. Remember this always: a work is yours, a truth is yours, in whatever form you may exist; do with it, deal with it, even in that way in which it was meant. Your drop of existence is part of the whole of existence; keep this in mind, and live out the existence which is yours, to the fulfillment and glorification of the great and glorious Whole. Farewell, farewell."

Fainter and fainter waxed their light as they retreated slowly to the far off starry

heights, while the dewdrops heralded the coming day with a chorus of a faint "Farewell."



VII.

The Birth of the Winds.

THE BIRTH OF THE WINDS.

'Twas the birth of the winds.—
As they struggled on high
In the mighty, vast womb of heaven,
Creation moaned with impatient sigh,
"What offspring to us is given
That will cause this voiceless life to cry,
And the mists of earth to be riven?"

'Twas the birth of the winds.—
First issued the north,
And the universe stood in awe,
As with blustering breath emerged he forth
With the whirlwind's thundering roar;
And launched away on his boisterous path,
Hilarious, exulting to soar.

'Twas the birth of the winds.—
Next, the summer breeze fanned
And breathed itself into night,

As warm and soft o'er a southern land,
It weltered in liquid light;
Or, scorched with the heat of a tropic sand,
Warmed the chill of the northern night.

'Twas the birth of the winds.—
And when piercingly keen
From the east a bitter blast blew,
Creation shuddered, and sought to screen
Itself, as the hurricane grew;
For he withered all in their freshest green,
As, a baneful blight, he flew.

'Twas the birth of the winds.—
When from out of the west
Wafted the zephyr breeze free,
All earth rejoiced in its balmy rest,
Its moist soft breath of the sea;
Declaring the younger wind was the best
As it floated o'er town and lea.

VIII.

The Icicle.

THE ICICLE.

She was a beautiful thing, clear as crystal, pure and transparent as glass, graceful and fantastic in form, delicately and wonderfully fair in her glittering loveliness and icy beauty.

She hung suspended from the dark bough of a giant oak in the midst of a sparkling feathery frost world, and she far surpassed her fair sisters who clustered in graceful groups and fantastic assortment from every branch and spray around.

So at least thought the sunbeam, as he wound his way through the overhanging boughs, and gradually crept closer to the fair object of his admiration.

They saw him coming, those ice maidens; watched him drawing nearer and nearer into their midst; and each did her

best to outshine her sisters and appear most beautiful to his radiant eyes.

She saw him; and as the light of his presence fell athwart her, she flashed with a thousand prisms in his sight.

"O, crystal maiden, how fair, how beautiful is your glittering resplendancy!"

The proud heart of the ice maiden swelled with exultation as the words of the sunbeam fell upon her ear. Cold she was, and cold she had been to the many wooers who had sought her favor. The frost, her cousin, she had scorned in high disdain, though he had pressed her hard in the strength of his attachment. The wintry fog had encompassed her around, but she had remained proof against his encircling charms. The north wind had assailed her and wooed her with his chilly breath. The spirits of the hail and sleet had striven to impress her

with their worth; but all to no purpose—she had remained impregnable and indifferent to them all.

But now there comes another, not only equally persistent in his wooing, but more passionate in his ardor, more flattering in his speech, and more dangerous in the heat of his desire. She trembles at his approach, and quails her hard and glittering breast. His voice, soft and seductive as the Summer wind, moves her strangely with its warm impassioned tones; his admiration stirs her soul and breaks down the once firm barrier of indifference and reserve.

"Sweet maid, the delicacy of your fantastic shape, the splendor of your lustrous beauty delight me! How bluey white the edges of your jagged form, the drooping fringe of your icy drapery! How you glisten in my eyes! I saw you from my

parent home; your matchless beauty fired my soul; I craved to see you near, to look upon your loveliness and bathe you in my love. Ice maiden, hear me! Fair daughter of the Winter, let me but touch your snowy lips!"

"Beware! fair cousin," cried the frost. "A kiss from him is death. Beware! the false deceiver would rob you of your life and beauty!"

But, quivering with triumph and delight, the foolish ice maiden listened to the assiduous flatterer, and, heedless of her cousin's words, scorning the warning cry of Nature, yielded to the bright tempter, who, creeping nearer and nearer, at last enveloped her in his encircling rays, and pressed his burning kisses on her fair, white, chilly lips.

Ah me! his touch was fatal. She felt it sink down deep into her being, draining

her strength, and weakening her vitality. His arms enshrouded her, his influence sucked her very soul. Weak and faint she lapsed in his embrace—each burning caress melting body and spirit together. Her sisters groaned and trembled on their boughs; the frost, defeated and powerless against the fatal passion of his rival, fled away, as the once beauteous queen of the ice world, dissolving into liquid, sank undone and uncreated again into the watery element whence she sprang.

IX.

Worlds that so Bright Appear.

WORLDS THAT SO BRIGHT APPEAR.

Worlds that so bright appear,
  Burnished with light
High o'er the waters drear
  Through the long night.

Worlds of another clime
  Strange to this earth,
Long, long before our time
  Dated their birth.

Worlds hung in sapphire space,
  Vividly clear,
Worlds that the human race
  Once did revere.

Worlds that each sect and tongue
  Marvel to see,
Wondering from whence they sprung
  So mightily.

Worlds, great thy mystery!
  Yet ever to be
Shining reality
  Lighting life's sea.

X.

Thisteldown.

L. of C.

THISTLEDOWN.

Puff! blew the wind, and away they went in a mad medley of delight. The air was filled with them, whirling, floating, dancing, rollicking hither and thither, like a flock of downy feathers, the sunshine bathing them in his splendor, the wind luring them in a thousand different directions with his irresistible and persuasive breath.

"Foolish innocents," quoth the wrathful thistle-tree; "keep at home, I say! The wanton wind lureth you to your destruction; be content, nor seek to roam—my bosom is your safest shelter, my weaponed arm your sure retreat."

But away they went, heedless of their parent's angry expostulation; and leaving their fluffy bed amidst her prickles,

launched forth upon the pinions of the wind.

"Whither away?" cried a butterfly, passing them in her flight.

"To see the world, and to follow our own sweet wills!" replied they, soaring higher with exultation.

"Make the most of your time, then!" returned the bright-winged creature, flitting to a distant flower.

"Ah!" responded the thistledown in chorus, "we will, we will. Blow, wind, blow! and waft us to some stranger spot."

But the breeze had for the while dropped, and after floating aimlessly about for a space, they sank disconsolate upon the grassy mead.

But only for a moment. On they went again, caught by the rising eddy, and carried on, on, they knew not whither.

"This is delightful!" they cried, mad with intoxicating revelry; but like all earthly passions, it was doomed at last to cease.

Down dropped the wind again, and this time for good; the sun sank lower in the west, and then—ah, then? They had left their home and shelter—their parent's parting words came back to them, "the wind lureth you to your destruction." The dew would fall and they would be soaked, drenched, dishevelled, out of shape and life—their snowy fairness gone—their fluffy lightness utterly destroyed—weighed down and dragged to earth—soiled, polluted, and undone. Light and frivolous as they were, the heavy truth bore down upon them and crushed them with its weight. Careless and gay as a mortal's thoughtless word,

they heedlessly left their parent's sheltering breast, and now—now?

A flock of birds at this moment flew out from some neighboring trees and alighted upon the bushes around.

"See here!" cried one to her mate; "see here what treasure I have found!" And she fluttered with pleasure around a knot of thistledown that had clustered about a thorny bough.

"See here what I have found!—a soft, warm lining for our little nest; see here! a bunch of fluffy thistledown! Come, sweet, and help me carry it away."

Fluttering with delight, the little birds then set to work and had soon conveyed the silent yet grateful thistledown to their home in a lofty tree.

"Ah, this is fortunate!" it sighed as it was cunningly woven together with

feather-fluff and wool into the warm inner coating of the wild bird's nest.

"It is very comfortable," remarked the wool complacently.

"Yes," joined in the feather-fluff, "and very cozy."

"It is delightful!—a haven of shelter!" continued the thistledown, warmly; "here we shall be safe from the falling dew and the damp, moist earth; no rain can reach us now, screened by the brown bosom of the gentle bird."

"The rain is certainly disagreeable, and the dew is hardly less so," replied the wool; "I feared when the bramble tore me from the back of the sheep that I should be left to the mercy of the elements, but the eager eyes of the songster spied me, and he bore me hither to my great relief."

"And we," returned the thistledown,

"we left our parent and our home to float upon the sun-kissed breeze; it blew us here and there and we were in delight, when lo!—it sank, and left us to drift on until we were caught in the toils of a thorny shrub, where the night dew would have drenched us and washed our life away."

"These terrors of which you speak I have never heard of before; plucked from the tender bosom I so warmly clad, I was without ado placed here to help line this nest—for what reason I cannot say. But ah!——"

Full soon the questioning of the feather-fluff was answered, full soon the reason of their having been borne hither was explained;—three little blue eggs reposed upon their downy softness. And warm and snug they lay for many a day, till, one bright morn, the little nest was all

alive—the eggs had vanished, and in their place were three little wide-beaked birds. Ah me! how they loved their home; and how cozy the downy lining of the nest would keep them while their parents fetched them food!

* * * * * *

"We have not lived in vain," said the sheep's wool one day when the young birds had grown and one had left the nest, soon to be followed by the others.

"We have not lived in vain," he again remarked when the nest was empty and the birds had flown.

"No," responded the thistledown; "Nature saw our repentance, forgave our former wilfulness, and set us other work to do. Our task is now completed, we can do no more."

"Ah," joined in the feather-fluff sadly, "our time is over, we are not what we were."

"No," said the thistledown, now soiled and flattened with the constant pressure of the new-flown fledglings, "we are no longer what we were; still, it is a comfort in our slow decay to feel that our disobedience was forgiven, and that although so small and insignificant, we have been after all of some use in the vastness of the great world's wants; and who knows, who knows to what use we may yet be put."

The summer passed, the rough winds blew, the late rains fell, the thistle-tree was struck to earth, and the little nest in the spreading branches of the sturdy forest elm was soaked, torn and shaken to the ground, where it lay the winter through, sheltering from the bitter frost the delicate roots of a wood violet that grew at the foot of the great elm-tree.

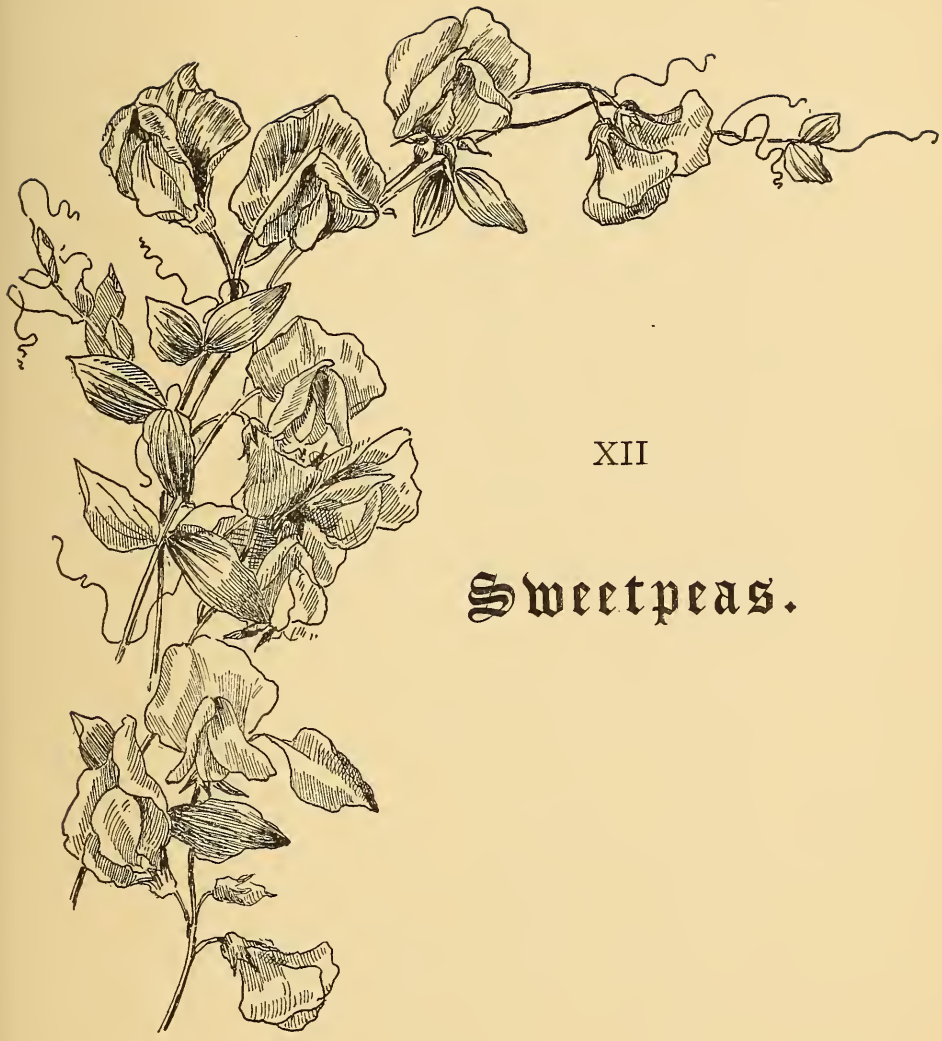
XI.

A White Pansy.

A WHITE PANSY.

'Twas one August morn when earth lay fair
And blushing with flowers that scented the air,
That a little white blossom first opened its leaves,
And drank in the breath of earth's sweet scented sheaves.

A little white pansy, so fair and frail,
Too lovely and pure for life's harsher gale,
It bloomed for a space, then closed up again,
And the little white thought passed out, to remain.



XII

Sweetpeas.

SWEETPEAS.

Sweetpeas are a well-known family, easily recognized by the loving affection through which the members cling to each other and to all with which they come in contact; also by the rare gentleness of their dispositions, so remarkable as to have caused Flora, in the days of the flower creation, to pronounce her blessing upon them, and, in addition to their elegant, shapely, and rich tinted beauty, to endow them with a marvelously fragrant perfume, like to the influence of a soul beaming with the radiance of unselfish thoughts.

The blossoms, the daughters of the tribe, are lovely in the extreme, and noted, in the flower world, for the richness of their beauty. There are the blondes—

fair virgins of spotless hue and simplicity, through whose pure fragile loveliness the golden eye, characteristic of the species, shines mildly and gently forth. Some are robed entirely in white, or with a narrow band of purple or crimson edging the delicate outlines of their light and graceful forms. They stand on the parent stem like downy snow flakes, etherealized, and yet materialized towithstand the smiles and kisses of the summer sun. Others are clothed in pink, from the deepest shades of carmine to the palest and most delicate tints of rose that ever tinged a sea-shell; others again are tinted with blue and mauve or even a suspicion of heliotrope; and some, dusky maidens, are radiant in a mottled variety of color, or dusty with purple and crimson powder scattered upon their satin skins like the down on the wings of a beautifully speckled butterfly.

Then there are the brunettes; dark, glorious blossoms, whose rich beauty and velvety voluptuousness are so glowingly lovely in the profusion and gorgeousness of their blue-black and crimson-purple tints. Wondrously beautiful, all of them; growing, mixing, clinging together in every conceivable variety of shade and hue, the richness of their perfume pervading the air around and drawing the bees and the butterflies to revel in the deliciousness and luxuriance of their bountiful sweetness.

How beautiful they are! green, swaying, curling stems, bending at will and accommodating themselves to all circumstances, yet bearing their lovely offsprings gracefully, contentedly, happily and proudly.

No wonder Flora loves them and ranks them among the choicest and sweetest of

her children. Besides, their beauty and perfume often bring comfort and delight into the careworn hearts and lives of struggling men, who hail them as messengers of peacefulness and love, summoning memories of fields and trees, deep blue skies and bright warm sunshine.

No idle or useless life lead these fragrant blossoms; and all things living in the role of Nature, whether great or small, each has its allotted task, its share in the great world's movements, workings, and evolutions; and each simple flower, as it glances in the sun, or raises its head gratefully to drink of the refreshing showers, has a place and a portion in the mighty book of existence, and lives and grows an individual destiny. Not the least of its graceful acts is the loving encouragement which it gives to toiling men and women who strive with even greater cares. In

this is it not indeed a helper and a joy-giving companion? And shares it not the live-giving spirit of love in the human heart?

XIII.

Serenata.

SERENATA.

I see thee, maiden, stand before me
In waves of silver light,
The cool night breeze as it sweeps thy hair,
Sigheth with pure delight.
I see the veil of the filmy moon
Around thy vision cling,
And the blue hued stars look down and smile
Upon so fair a thing.

The gathering night spreads her cloud afar,
Though wedded to the moon;
In the forest I hear the night owl screech,
On the shore the ocean's boom.
O child of earth, with thine eyes of night
And figure of sylph-like form,
As the elements wild the emotions stir

And burst in terrific storm,
Of a passion that like the cyclone swells
My tongue would tell to thee,
Of a love that is great as the ocean wide
In its vast immensity.
The earth is still, and the night wind sighs
As I my love declare
And lay my heart at thy fair young feet,
My Queen, beyond compare!

XIV.

The Leaf Elves.

THE LEAF-ELVES.

Winter is over; the snow has disappeared from the ground, and the frost from the pane; the rivers and streams, bursting their prison bonds, bound forth limpid and joyous once more, each rippling wavelet murmuring its jubilant song and coquettishly raising its crested lips to meet the kisses of the wanton wind. The naked forest trees, that for so many months past have stood like giant spectres tossing their gaunt arms in the wintry storm, now spread their branches and sway gracefully before the fresh spring breeze as it rustles through the labyrinth of delicate sprays that form so fantastic a network against the clear blue sky.

The warm, pregnant beams of the life-giving sun come stealing forth, and

caressing each brown shining leaf-bud, burst it open at a touch, revealing the wee leaf-elf lying curled up inside, whose pale eyes blink with wonderment as they gaze for the first time on the light of day.

Such is the birth of the leaf-elf; and as the leaf that is born with him unfolds, and grows stouter and deeper in texture and color, even so does he himself expand and develop into fullness and maturity, keeping pace with his parental cradle and home.

At first the Spring breezes strike chilly to the tender little sprite; so, wrapping himself in the tiny folds of his bright green mantle, he awaits the warmth and brightness of the friendly rays before venturing out to sport with his companions. Each leaf, we see, has its little fay; and as the days brighten and lengthen the elves come forth in myriads and perch

upon the twigs and branches, bounding from leaf to leaf, swaying from spray to spray, playing a rare game of hide and seek with the sunbeams. At night, each elf curls his leaf around him, and thus sheltered, sleeps securely, rocked by the night winds as they pass mournfully through the silent labyrinth of darkness, like restless spirits visiting in gloom the land of embodiment and material life.

As the summer advances, the leaves and their little inhabitants assume a richer, if more sombre tint, for they are scorched by the strong rays of the sun while basking in its sleepy radiance—the languid wind scarce stirring a twig or stem in the voluptuous stillness of the summer heat.

Many are the duties of the leaf-elves. They must pay unceasing attention to the welfare and appearance of their airy little homes. Carefully they comb out the fine

fibrine down, upon the surface of the leaves, and duly curl and uncurl the delicate edges, catching the dew as it falls and tenderly applying it to the sensitive pores, and so cooling and refreshing their vitality after the dust and glare of the day. Many enemies of the insect tribe have they to contend with, against whom they wage perpetual warfare—caterpillars that devour their dwellings; flies and gnats that lay their poisoned eggs beneath the delicate upper skin of the foliage, and raise a blister on its smooth, fair surface, or sow seeds of disease that soon consume it altogether. So the greatest care has to be exercised to preserve the leaves from the wary attacks of these insect foes; and should an elf fail in his guardianship, death or disfigurement come upon him and upon the poor leaf which he should have protected; for disease and decay are

reflected from the leaf to the elf himself, and sad it is when they fall a prey to the enemy, especially before the great event of their life takes place.

What is this great event? It is nature's carnival, occuring in the autumn, when all the foliage of the earth is dressed in rich, vivid autumnal tints. Then it is that the army of resplendent leaves awaits the rising of the boisterous gale, at whose call they all give answer, and quitting forever their hold upon the parent tree, bound joyously forth upon the wings of their allurer, hovering for awhile between earth and sky, then caught by the next eddy are again spurned wildly aloft, each elf riding astride his individual leaf, laughing and singing and jostling his neighbor in this mad but life-closing revelry; for, at last, the wind subsides, the autumn mists arise and spread their damp breath

around, and the leaves and leaf-elves lie heaped in dank, unsightly masses, slowly going through the process of decay and awaiting the ebbing of their leaf-day life to become absorbed once more in the all-supplying ocean of natural force.

XV.

Norma.

NORMA.

I

The sun had set. The after-glow
Gleamed softly with a roseate light.
In fiery flakes of fleecy foam
The bosom of the western sky lay veiled.
O'er all a deep pulsating hush slow spread,
As though the evening waited for the night.
When lo! most rudely broken was the calm
Of eve by one low plaintive wail that stirred
The heart of Nature from her rest,
And fixed in keen attention her great soul.

"O Midnight! darker than thy blackest shade
Is the dread depth of my despair.
Ah me! my soul is destitute,

I cry, and drink my bitter tears,
And choking heart-wrung sighs do burst;
In visions dark my grief oppresses me.
My loving, if unworthy heart, is reft
Of light and joy, of happiness and peace;
Anguish is now its only food.
O loving nature! in thy wilderness
Of glowing life my voice shall pour its grief
And cry to thee for succor and for aid.

I loved, I love and I was once beloved.
And sweet the hours that passed for me and mine,
Steeped as they were in Love's delicious fount,
Each separate being merged in one heart-beat,
Each line of thought forever twining round
The other, as the tendrils of the vine
Do twine. E'en so we lived and loved.

And perfect faith as close as clinging moss
Did clothe in vivid verdure our true love.

And pure it was, e'en though the deepest
wave
Of stirring soul intensity swept o'er.
And carried with it our two struggling
hearts
That loved so strongly, fervently and
well.
Then still more wholly did our souls
become
Into one being blended, riper still
Became our love. My life had I laid
down
To benefit my dear one, and he his
Would have laid down for me.

His father's vow, that,
Never should he bride bring to his home,
Without a dowry, caused us then to live
Reluctantly without acknowledged tie.

Alas! Alas! 'tis but a few days since
There came into our beauteous vale of love
A snake, with glittering eyes and jeweled
scales,
That glided through the grass and stung
me, here.
Its cruel fangs sank deep within my heart
And left their poison there. My Erza was
So dazzled by the beauty of the thing,
He did not see my pain, nor did he heed
Nor know the danger pending to his soul.

He gazed and gazed, till, gazing he was
struck
With beauty's poison, deadlier than all.
So subtly did the fascination work
That by degrees he left me, and for one
Who loves him not but who will lead him
on,
Enticing his pure soul with all the charms
Of her bewild'ring evil beauty's power,

Alluring him to gain the gold
And all the riches of his father's lands.
Once these possessed she'll wither up his soul
With cold contempt and scornful cruel hate,
While I, his true love and his faithful one,
Have power none to win him back.

Did she but love him then mayhap my grief
Would be less keen, my love might brook the blow
But O! his anguish when with soul deceived
He wakes too late to rectify his wrong!
O Nature, hear! I lay me on thy breast
And press my beating bosom to thine own.
O Mother, soothing, tender, bountiful!
Spare unto me of thine abundant store
A little calm endurance, patient hope,
Persistent courage, and the vital strength

To follow him through all his devious ways
That with my woman's instinct I may grasp
The sense of lurking foes around his path.
Grant me the power to shield his life from harm;
To shroud him with my love, e'en though unknown,
That I may win his soul at last to mine,
If such a thing may be—forevermore.

Hear this my prayer! for mine he surely is,
As is the child unborn both his and mine.
I care not through what sorrows I must pass,
What fearful shadows may enshroud my soul,
If I may but win him back.—O mercy! Earth,
And grant my soul's petition or I die
The worst of deaths—a living, life-long woe.

The voice died out in broken sobs.
The Wind
In keen compassion for her grief,—sighed
Then rising on his rustling wings,—wailed:
"Grief! grief! such grief!
Would I could comfort thee!
Thy sorrows will I bear to him;
The voice of thy deep agony
Shall haunt his soul,—my wings
Shall waft it to his ear.
Ah! grief! such grief!
Would I could comfort thee."

"Tears! tears! such tears!
See how they fall! And he
Shall see them thus whene'er he hears
My voice, or sees my spray," the cascade cried.

"And on my bosom shall they surely flow
Forever," murmured low the rippling brook;

"Yea, to a river shall they swell and slide."

"We'll look at him with thy sad, patient eyes,"
The flowerlets said; "and as the leaves do fall.
Thy loving words in mem'ry on his heart
Shall drop; the breath of thy true love
In our sweet perfume shall be borne to him."

"The story of thy woe, thy heart's sad moan,
Shall reach him in our songs," —so chirped the birds.

The mountains lowered, the sea, the sky, the plain,
Suffused in tearful mist, echoed afar:
"Take courage, faithful heart, set to thy task

Of self-abandonment, and shield thy love.
And in thy proffered breast, bared for his sake,
Receive the wounds dealt by his hand, and prove
The capability of thy great love.
Take comfort to thy soul, for with one voice
All things respond to thee; thy grief is ours;
Acquit thee nobly, and our aid, for sure,
Will strengthen every effort that thou mak'st."

The voices ceased; Night dropped her veil, and lo!
The prostrate figure of the maid arose;
And stole, a phantom gliding through the shade.
So pale, so pure and lone, with such
A rapt resolve and sadness on the face,

That like a pearl in ebon frame it shone
Amid the masses of her cloud-like hair.

II

The scene changed; and broad sweeping lawns
Rolled out to where rich orange groves and sweet,
Delicious oleander trees
Perfumed afar the moonlit air.

But ah! there was a subtler beauty near,
Whose magic paled the splendor of the night.
A white-domed palace rose amid the trees
And on the broad, low flight of marble steps
That led down to the terrace walk beneath,
A woman stood. . . .
A visitant from the Beauty spheres
Of loftiest, loveliest thought she seemed;
Her slender swaying lithesome form
Was rich in curves; her hair a crown of gold;

Her spotless robe took on the hue of night,
And gleamed in bluish lustre to her feet.
From the piazza's roof a red lamp hung,
That shed its dim light down upon her face,
Staining the steps she stood upon.

Another to her side drew near,
With adoration stamped upon
His features as he bent his face
To hers, and gently laid his hand
Upon her bare, white sculptured arm
That lay upon the marble balustrade.
Without the slightest start she turned her eyes
Full upon his. What bliss divine
Was there in that deep gaze? For lo! he quailed,
He shuddered and recoiled. Those eyes of blue
Have yet more magic than they know well of,

And, true to the wide sky whose light they bear,
Unbid, have conjured up to him
A vision of his Norma's face.

Her calm look deepened, and a set surprise
Grew out of its still depth. And then he spoke:
"Forgive me! dear one," faltered his pale lips,
"Emotion overcame me, but, 'tis past.
There is a fascination in your eyes
I never knew before. Somehow, I think—
But no, let be; thine eyes are perfect, Sweet,
And very walls of love. Nay, look not so!
Have I offended you? 'Twas but the shade
Of some old mem'ry flashed forth in your gaze,
And woke a mournful echo in my heart;

But now 'tis past. Smile on me once
again,
My peerless one—lo! I am at your feet."

"How! are my eyes so dull that they can
bring
But shady mem'ries to your quav'ring
breast?
Is that the only joy that unto you
My feeble beauty has the power to give?"
She sighed; a look of softness crossed her
face,
And shone reproachfully and sadly there,
E'en though her voice had had a touch of
scorn.

"Nay, nay, Eudora, happiness is mine
Whenever I am near you! Twas but once
And for a moment, that there came a face
Betwixt my love and you; fear naught, 'tis
gone,
The night seems chilly, and is deathly still—

Why stand you here so coldly proud and
lone?—
The wind stirs mournfully, my spirits
droop,—
I crave of you some love, some little
warmth
To chase away the gloominess of night.
Be not so cold! Your beauty maddens me!
Press your lips once to mine!—'tis all I
ask."

"All that you ask! when other faces dwell
And linger in your thoughts! Nay! I were
weak
And spiritless as you to take such love,
And dream that it was mine. What! is
regret
Mixed in the passion which you say
Burns in your breast for me? Nay then,
return
To her! She's fair, though weak, poor wench!

And dowerless, forsooth! Still go to her;—
Her nerveless soul entices you, and draws
The very manhood from your veins.
Go then, and may her pale face comfort
you!"

She moved away in haughty, proud disdain,
Yet turned again to see what weight
Her icy words had had. He, for a time
Stood motionless, then crushed with ruthless will
The rising pangs of bitter keen remorse,
And hugged his passion closer as he sprang,
By her great beauty conquered, to her feet.

"Eudora, sweet Eudora! say not so;
Spurn me not from you. O my Love!
How fair, how very fair you are! What spell
Is there within the magic of your eyes?

See how your sweet enchantment draws
my soul!
I burn with love, yet are you cold.
Eudora, list! what other face can e'er
Have charms for me, once I have yours
beheld?
What form, however sylph-like in its lines,
Can e'er compete with yours? Your snowy
neck,
White as the under-wing of floating swan;
Your hair, its threads of gold a coronet;
Your azure eyes, deep, clear as summer
skies—
What other maid has glories like to you?

None, none, you are supreme! That phan-
tom-face,
Pale as a lily, in its shady hair,
Has not one sparkle of your loveliness;
The mournful eyes in their dark depths,
reflect
All shadows that may fall across the face.

Yours, yours are bright and blue, and sparkle keen,
And shoot their arrows deep within my heart;
Your pouting lips are rich and ripe with smiles.
Be not so cruel! You but lead me on
With your persuasive loveliness, then cast,
Me from you in your frozen scorn.
Be not so heartless! Turn on me once more
The favors of your lately-spoken love."

He seized her hand—She drew it not away,
He stooped and kissed her—and she smiled on him;
Then laughing, drew herself aside,
" 'Tis late," she said, "your father must I see.
E'er I retire to rest. Come then with me.
We'll tell him of our love, he'll give us joy—

His dearest wish is granted. Come
The night is chilly, and the lamp burns dim."

III

"Alas! my child—my little nameless one—
Your father has forsaken us. Poor babe!
Your fate has cast you in a ruthless world,
With none to welcome you, and none to fill
Your little cup with overflowing love,
Except your mother with her broken heart
That spills its fondness and its grief intense
Upon your new-born soul. Ah, helpless one!
Poor little sinless babe! Your natal-day
Breaks gloomily for you and me, alas!
To-day I press you for the first sweet time,
With all a mother's yearning in my soul.
To-day life's greatest joy do I receive,

And O dear heart! its greatest sorrow too,
Endowed am I, and the same day bereft.
Ah babe! my little babe!—(his child and
mine!
Forsaken both) your day of birth, alas,
Great Heavens! is too—your father's wed-
ding day."

IV

Ablaze with light, the white-domed palace
stood;
From end to end it shone with many stars;
Its domes, its spires, its many pinnacles,
Were bathed in colored warmth and flash-
ing flame.
The banquet hall, chief centre of the light,
Was filled to overflowing; many guests
Were seated at the marriage feast
Of Erza and his new-made bride.

"We'll drink their health," the old man
cried,

And raised his glass on high. "We'll drink
their health,
My merry friends: The bridegroom and
his bride!
Long life, Eudora· many years
Of wedded life and bliss be yours!
May time deal kindly with a brow
Where beauty's fairest touch is laid!
You are a woman, too, of sense, of strength
And influence, the very wife I would have
my Ezra choose. Long life my son,
And health and strength wherewith your
double wealth
You may enjoy! Pledge them again my
friends:
Long life unto the bridegroom and his
bride!"

The red wine sparkled in his cup,
As Erza rose to thank the guests
For the vociferous applause
With which they hailed his father's speech.

"I thank you friends, your wishes bring us
joy;
Most welcome are the sentiments you show,
Both one and all, to my fair wife and me;—
I thank you in her name and in my own.
Eudora,—Ah!" . . . . .

The red wine shook and fell
In drops of blood from off the goblet brim.
What form was that which glided to his
arms?
Whose sigh was that soft fanning on his
cheek?
What odor, faint and sweet, recalled in force
That vision to his soul just then?
Was it the perfume of the wax-like flowers
Reposing in Eudora's bridal wreath?

Nay, 'twas not orange blossom shed the
scent,
Nor tuberose, nor yet gardenia flower;

Those subtle perfumes, in their richness spake
Of his bewitching bride alone.
Once more he raised the cup and drank the toast;
Again his hand shook and the wine was spilled.
He took his seat beside his bride, and saw—
A single lily, broken from its spray
Among her bridal wreaths, and, pure and white,
Laid down beside him on the banquet board.

V

"O Iris, that upon your fair young head
Your parents' sin should thus be visited!
Fair as you are and innocent,
And pure as snowflake dropt from heaven,
You're branded in the eyes of all mankind,
And shut, an outcast, from the homes of men!

O Heaven! the great injustice that doth sway
The cruel judgment of an impure race!
My child, by right you hold your place among
The purest and most virtuous of maids;
Your hopes are theirs too, should be sweet and high,
Your prospects bright as any cloudless sky,
All marred alas! your rich young life despoiled,
The scorned of men, an object of contempt;
And this because the one who loves you most,
Your mother, who would shield you with her life,
Loved in her youth a faithless one, and doomed
Your blameless innocence with her great sin!
This misplaced judgment on your head has been

To me the cruelest bitterness of all.

I sought to shield your life, my sweet one, from
The consequences of your mother's shame,
And for that reason dwelt apart
As much as might be from our fellow men.
I strove to foster in your soul the love
It early showed for Nature's loveliness.
I smiled when pleased, when birds and beasts and flowers
And scenic beauty, hills and sky and sea,
Drew words of rapture from your youthful lips.
Full well content was I to dwell with thee,

My little daughter, in the solitude
And peacefulness of quiet country life.
And as the years slid by, and from a child
To maidenhood I saw you bud,
With joy I watched your beauty grow

Like some grand tree in fairness and in strength.
But with far greater pride I watched your soul
Encase itself like jewel in chaste gold.
I marvelled and rejoiced that you, my child,
Born to such wretchedness, should yet become
One of earth's fairest flowers. With grateful pride
I watched you, loved you, guided you, and taught,
Yea, taught you all that I would have you be;
And shielded you from shadow of my sin,
Lest it should dull your day, and cloud with gloom

The innocence and brightness of your sky.
But still I kept you not in ignorance
That black deceit and sorrow stalked the world,

That sin could mar the fairest spot on earth.
And I am glad, for it has shielded you
In your great hour of trial and of need.
I little thought that even here to you
Would come love's semblance to his foeman's garb!

My child! love visited your mother once,
But not in such a wicked, wanton form;
He came in all good faith, and afterwards
In bitter conflict fell. But unto you
Came foulest treachery, and base
Dishonorable intent to take
Advantage of your innocence and youth.
And when he knew he'd won your heart's best love
He strove to lower you, through it, to sin;
And failing, flung the stigma of your birth
Into your unsuspecting ears, and thought
When love failed, shame would drive you to his arms.

But rooted in your innocence you stood,
And then he broke your heart, and cast your love
In cold contempt and bitter scorn aside,
And asked you who would wed a nameless maid—
Ah Heaven! that such men should be free to live."

"My mother, you were more bereft than I;
I have your faithful love to comfort me.
I'm glad I know your secret trouble, for
A greater solace will I strive to be.
We'll live the more each for the oth'rs sake,
And in each oth'rs grief forget our own.
I'll ask you naught, my mother dear, of him
To whom we both belong, but we will love,
Yes, love him in our thoughts, and e'en forgive

The wrong that he has done us. Even he
Must think of us sometimes, and with what
thoughts
We cannot say—perhaps the wrong he did
Has borne more bitter fruit to him than
e'en
To you or me."

"My Iris! loving child,
If your young heart can thus forgive its
wrongs
I cannot then repine, for greater far
The wrong done unto you by each of us.
Your father loved me truly, once, until
Another wantonly destroyed our peace,
And wrecked our lives upon a desert
strand.
But my love has not changed; I love him
yet
As I have always done, and always
shall."

VII

"Oh Norma, Norma, my true faithful love!
All earth conspires against me for the wrong
I did you in my base black treachery.
O Norma, ever closest to my soul
Has your pure spirit clung. Throughout the years
Spent by deed apart from you, your voice
Has held sweet converse through the many tongues
Of earth; the babbling brooks have echoed free
Your silvery laughter as it used to flow;
As falling leaves your loving words have dropped
In sweet remembrance on my saddened brain;
Your smile, bright as the sunbeam's early ray
Upon the distant hills, has shone on me;

Your tender sighs, love fraught as summer winds
With rich perfume, have blended with the breeze;
The shades of night recall your dusky hair,
The swaying trees your lithe and graceful form,
The mid-day heat speaks ever unto me,
Of the intensity of your great love.

But, ah! when moans the wind and howls the storm,
When falls unceasingly the weeping rain,
I see the tears of your great agony
Wrung from the desolation of your heart
Pierced doubly by the bitter taunts of all
Your unrelenting and self-righteous foes;
The grey sky darkens and lowers over you,
And from the shore I hear your mournful moan,

And the faint wailing of your nameless
child.

Ah Heaven! the years go by and still my
soul
Is haunted with your grief and with your
love—
For that you love me, well I know;
Yours was a heart that could not change
its tone—
Your love once given, was for aye.
I knew it, Norma, and my love returned—
Nay, it has never left you from the first,
Though blinded was I with a fatal spell,
The spell of my own base unfaithfulness;
But my great sin has found me out,
And through the years agone have I been
yours,
Yet fettered by the deed which brought
me naught
Save bitterness and pain.—And now, when
most

You need protection, powerless must I
stand
And hear both you and her, my own sweet
child,
Cursed by her father e'er her life began,
Made scoff of by the foulest of all men.

Our child! our Iris as you named her,
A child and yet a woman grown, most fair
In soul, resembling you, fed by the dew
Of truth and purity and love.—Ah! earth
Has been a friend most merciful to her,
The voices which with keen reproach have
sung
Forever in my ears, have brought pure joy
To both of you, have nurtured in your souls
The comfort of a sweet companionship.

My sufferings, howsoe'er intense, are well,
Aye, fully well deserved—but O! once more
To see you, Norma, and to hear your voice

In loving accents breathe forgiveness forth—
Ah heaven! the thought of it—all Nature swells
In the anticipation of my joy,
Could such a wild thing be. But yet I feel
A peaceful calmness soothing my tired brain,
The earth looks kindly at me as
At last she softens at my grief—
What sweet forgiveness have you breathed to her
And bade her lay upon my fevered soul?
Ah me! what lilies spring about my feet?
Whence comes this reuniting of our souls?
Earth is our comforter! her breast bursts forth
With pure white lilies — your beloved flowers!
I gather them, I press them close again—
Their breath, your essence, gives me now no pain!"

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